

Countershadows (tactics in evasion)

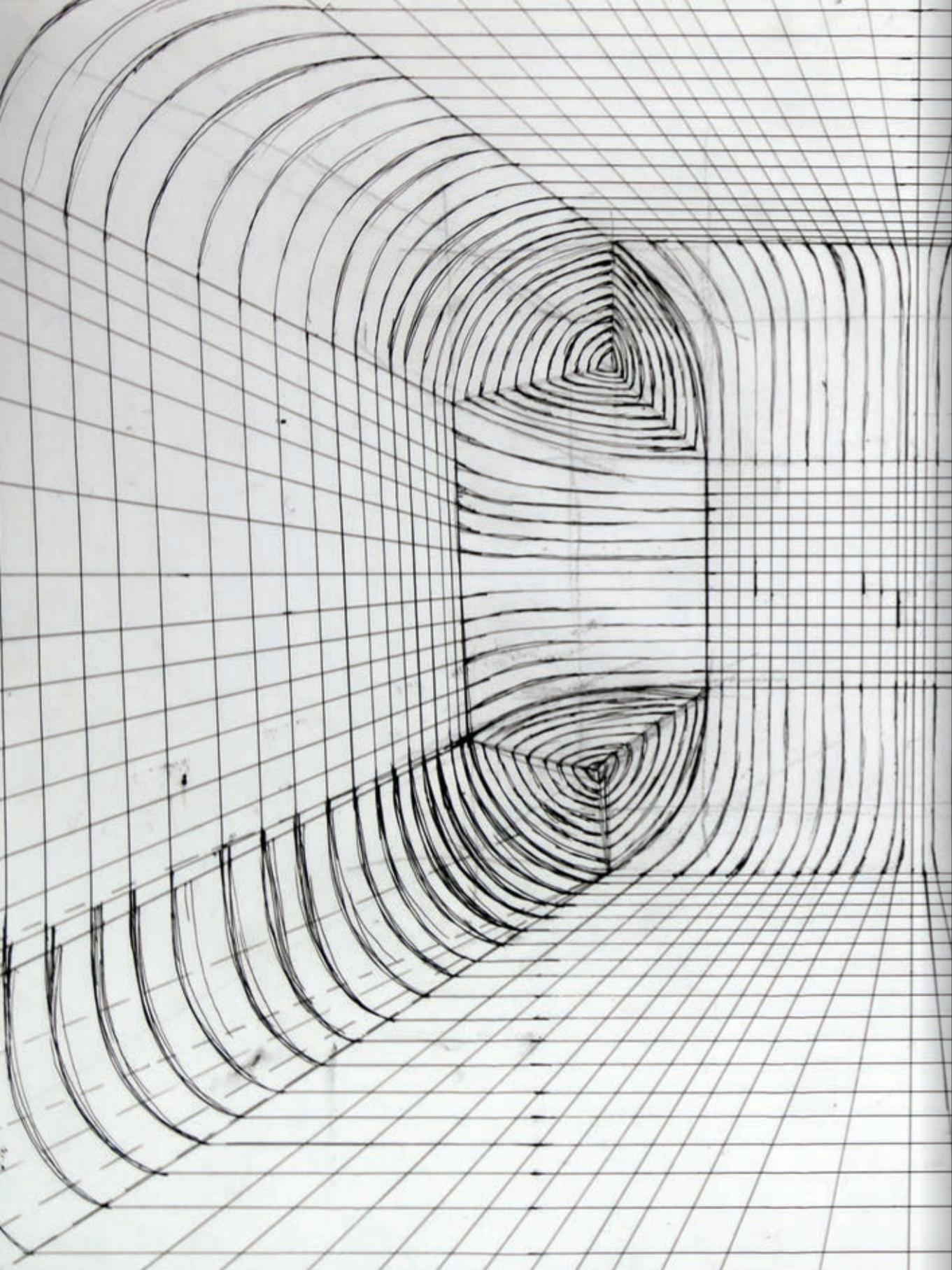


tactics in evasion





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Foreword
by Bala Starr

One of the most difficult and confronting questions artists and art institutions can ask themselves is what does art do? How does contemporary art operate and what are its mechanisms? How do these operative functions coalesce and connect to form intrinsic parts of what we understand art to mean? *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)* focuses on the mechanics of art making and exhibition making. As a lens through which to consider recent Singaporean art practice and the contemporary scene, the exhibition explores more ‘elusive’ political and social effects and pressures in Singapore as well as those that are common to many urban societies.

The works in *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)* are complex meditations on civic life, not reactive but reflective. The artists’ main concerns shift—sometimes a sense of passivity and permanent instability, sometimes mutability, fabrication, or enigma. The exhibition highlights a contrast between these concerns and didactic explanation. In building the exhibition, curator Melanie Pocock has foregrounded as a model and armature the paradox of camouflage—where the objective of remaining hidden relies first, remarkably, upon a process of revealing pervasive frameworks and conditions. She intriguingly suggests that this process of camouflage is in part a learned response to ‘obliterate visual signs’.

This exhibition is an ambitious project that addresses the newly configured architecture of the ICA Singapore’s three lower-level galleries. I commend Melanie Pocock for her pursuit of both risk and precision, and her collaboration with the exhibiting artists and her colleagues to refine ideas and processes. Melanie graduated from the MA Curating Contemporary Art programme at the Royal College of Art, London, before moving to Singapore in 2012. *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)* is her first major group exhibition in Singapore, and in June I was also very pleased to welcome her to our team as Assistant Curator.

For their individual works and their commitment to this project, I warmly thank each of the artists in the exhibition: Heman Chong, Tamares Goh, Ho Rui An, Sai Hua Kuan, Jeremy Sharma, Tan Peiling and Robert Zhao Renhui (The Institute of Critical Zoologists). I also thank the ICA Singapore team for their dedication to ensuring the exhibition’s success.

Bala Starr
Director, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore



Monument to the people we've conveniently forgotten (I hate you), 2008–ongoing
offset prints on 300 gsm paper
1 million parts, each 5 × 9 cm
Courtesy the artist and Wilkinson Gallery, London

This sculptural installation centers on a singular common object—a name card—multiplied a million fold. Sized 9 × 5.5 cm, and consisting of a double-sided, solid black offset print on 260 gsm paper, the name cards swarm and cover a given gallery floor as an understated, underfoot monument.

In this installation, blackness is barely recognized as a color; rather, it is black as defined by a million separate objects. Spread over the ground in layered piles to form an unbearable tactility and slippery instability, the name cards bring to mind notions of failed promises and the fruitless intimacy of personal relations. Acting as a monument to the nameless, forgotten and unimportant, *Monument to the people we've conveniently forgotten (I hate you)* is also a suggestion of how thin the line is between the emotions of love and hate.

As is customary in Heman Chong's practice, a great deal of conceptual attention was given to naming this work. Titles such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *A Short Story About an Unknown Organism from Australia That Is Bent on Infiltrating a Given Space, as Told by a Geomancer (I'd Like to Die Without Feeling Any Pain)* reflect the artist's desire not to obviate, but rather to supersede certain aspects of physical manifestation.

Amanda Lee Koe, 'Monument to the people we've conveniently forgotten (I hate you)' originally published in *Heman Chong: The Part In The Story Where We Lost Count Of The Days*, Hong Kong: ArtAsiaPacific, 2013.

Courtesy the author and *ArtAsiaPacific*.

*We Are Pigeons*, 2014

UV print on concrete, digital prints on rice paper

dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

Inspired by William Blake's poem *The Fly* (1794), *We Are Pigeons* considers the position of pigeons in urban societies. In the poem, Blake likens the ephemerality of human existence to a 'little fly' that is thoughtlessly brushed away by the author's hand. Like flies, pigeons are often considered pests, their pervasiveness making them unremarkable, invisible and seemingly disposable. In *We Are Pigeons*, Tamares Goh reveals the roots of these perceptions in human constructions of nature, as well as the implicit presence of pigeons in urban life.

The work draws on photographs of pigeons in various urban settings, taken by the artist over the past two decades. In many of the photographs, the pigeons disappear into grey landscapes; in others, they look like mirages, silhouetted against the concrete and sky. In these images, the pigeons' integration into their surroundings becomes a metaphor for their marginalisation. The birds' occluded status is also expressed in a number of photographs where they appear towards the edge of the image or beyond the frame.

For *We Are Pigeons*, Goh printed a selection of the photographs on different surfaces. The largest of these surfaces is a concrete wall, whose imposing presence evokes the endless urban expansion of global cities and the dominance of this expansion over natural life. On the wall, faint markings of pigeons can be seen, barely visible within the concrete. The life-size wall also relates the birds' situation to that of mankind, itself conditioned by urbanisation. When seen from another perspective, are humans not as insignificant as the common fly or pigeon? To quote Blake:

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

Dispersed throughout the exhibition, the prints reflect Goh's fleeting encounters with their subjects. These encounters also required a degree of evasion on her part, as the pigeons would have flown away if they had detected her presence. This tension—re-enacted in the work's display—highlights the tactics often involved in capturing subjects in photography, expressed in *We Are Pigeons* by the artist's invisible presence.

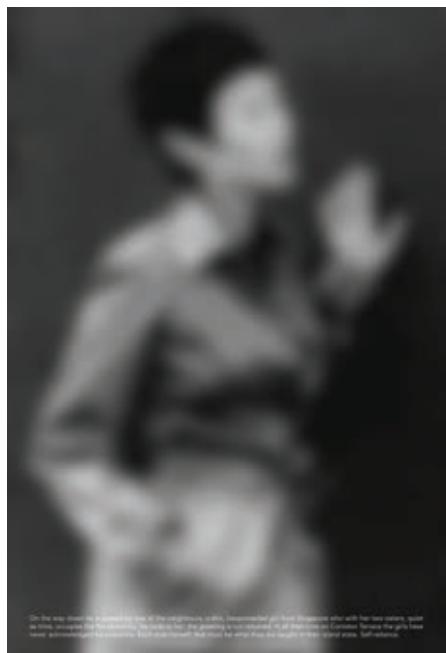


A Difficulty (Grey), 2014
HD video, black and white, sound
5:30 minutes
Courtesy the artist

A reflection on contemporary identity politics, *A Difficulty (Grey)* takes the form of a video testimony in which the voice of an unseen character relates her experience of ‘being grey’. Against existing socio-political constructions of colour, *A Difficulty (Grey)* attempts to arrive at a concept of ‘greyness’ as an achromatic force that undoes the colouration of colour, or in other words, that denies the raising of colour as entity. Grey, instead of being invoked as a colour, unravels in the video as colour’s recession, diffusing the visibility of colour as *colour*.

If prevailing articulations of colour seek to instrumentalise it as a means for identification and control, the greyness of the video—manifested both chromatically and meta-chromatically—attends to the excesses of colour that fail to be contained by such technologies of schematisation. Over a single static shot of a picture of the Hermann grid illusion that gradually appears above an empty couch, the voice insists upon a sensuous experience of greyness without ever offering it as an image, suggesting how the difficulties of seeing colour in itself are often obscured by the operations responsible for making colours seen.

Self-Reliant Girl, 2014
digital print
101.6 × 68.6 cm
Courtesy the artist



In JM Coetzee’s novel, *Slow Man* (2005), the protagonist passes by ‘a slim, bespectacled girl from Singapore who with her two sisters, quiet as mice, occupies the flat above his’. *Self-Reliant Girl* arrests this fleeting moment in a printed image. The work is part of an ongoing series of prints, each based on an oblique textual reference to Singapore culled from corpuses of world fiction. These references operate like cameos in a film, as otherwise forgettable moments until they are seized by the attention of an inhabitant of the island-state.

In the series, each extract is printed on an image gleaned by the artist using key words within the extract as search terms to scour through the Internet’s graphic detritus—though not before denuding the image of all specificity through such processes as blurring, cropping and masking. As a result, the image serves less as a representation of the text as a clearing upon which it inscribes itself. By mooring the text upon the receding ground of such uncertain imagery, each piece works to at once indulge and disturb the desire to see the Singapore alluded to, demanding that we approach the unseen, unwieldy nation-space through the indeterminacies of distance.

Something Nothing, 2007
plywood, plaster, paint, light
240 × 594 × 355 cm
Courtesy the artist

Something Nothing forms a part of Sai Hua Kuan's explorations of space, which use drawing as a metaphor. In *Drawing Between Nothing* (2009), the artist suspends bungee cords with magnetic ends that almost join together, 'revealing' the invisible magnetic fields between them. His series of videos and performances, *Space Drawing*, also explores the delineation of space through line, each following the release of a bungee cord stretched across abandoned industrial spaces.

Something Nothing explores the possibility of articulating space without the use of line. Inspired by the artist's idea of translating a blank piece of A4 paper into three dimensions, the work comprises a completely white space that bears no visible markers of its depth. Consisting of an enclosed room—only accessible via a single entrance—it gives those who enter the impression of floating in an infinite space. This sensation is created through the unique architecture of its interior, crafted and curved in such a way that when light is cast into the space, its corners and edges become invisible.

On the outside, *Something Nothing* appears banal, resembling a white room in which nothing much seems to happen. Its transient and humble effects also seem disproportionate to its sophisticated construction, used purely to create an experience of nothingness. Yet it is this incongruence that highlights the irony of *Something Nothing*, as an intangible experience that relies on the manipulation of physical material. It is both something and nothing; a physical space that evokes an ephemeral experience of being in a vacuum.



From Protective Colouration to the Recession of Colour:
Notes on *Countershadows* (*tactics in evasion*)
by Melanie Pocock

Artists have long been fascinated by camouflage, perhaps none more so than the American painter Abbott Handerson Thayer (1849–1921). Developing an entire theory on the origins and uses of protective colouration, Thayer sought to illustrate how certain animals had evolved to obliterate visual signs of their presence at vulnerable moments. By adopting patterns, colours and textures similar to their natural surroundings, such animals were essentially able to disappear from view. While these animals' camouflage appeared conspicuous outside of their natural context, their critical function was to conceal the animals from predators or prey; in other words, to form a tactical guise, which would only be solicited in the event of mortal threat.¹

Yet as Thayer's critics pointed out, animals live in dynamic environments that shift and change—not in fixed habitats. His theory was based on static relationships between animals and their environments, a kind of 'perfect puzzle' that failed to account for divergences in these relationships.² As Thayer himself acknowledged, when seen from any but the right point of view, the 'magic' of camouflage would be lost.³ However, ironically, it was also in this moment that its 'magic' was perceived; how else was it possible to realise protective colouration's ingenious mechanism if not through comparison before and after the fact?

It is these paradoxical dynamics in modes of concealment and elusion that have shaped *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)*. Taking its title from the graphic technique of countershading, in which gradations of colour and form are used to camouflage an object or a subject, the exhibition explores artworks that seek to escape the viewer. The ideas and intentions behind these works' evasions are diverse, but, like countershading, they all show that there is no real 'magic' to camouflage—only various forms of aesthetic and psychological trickery. In many of them, the viewer plays an integral part in their evasions, as the subject to whom their ruses are directed and through whom they are then processed. Drawing on conceptual and perceptual contradictions, the works demonstrate not only how evasion articulates itself through degrees of revelation, but a constant wavering between these two states.

Sai Hua Kuan's *Something Nothing*, for instance, both eschews and confronts the viewer. The work consists of a white room that is constructed to give those who enter the illusion of floating in a dimensionless space. Lights directed into the room from the outside indicate the source of its illusion, yet its overall enigma is still maintained by its invisible interior. In the work's evocation of a void, *Something Nothing* resembles *The Specialisation of Sensibility in the Raw Material State of Stabilised Pictorial Sensibility—The Void* (1958), a work by Yves Klein that comprised the empty contents of Galerie Iris Clert, an art gallery in Paris. But while Klein's framing of the gallery as a void sought to make its institutional context and 'force fields' visible, *Something Nothing* suspends visibility; its contents are neither discernibly visible nor invisible.⁴ A similar ironic loop surfaces in *Monument to the people we've conveniently*

forgotten (I hate you) by Heman Chong, where one million, anonymous, black business cards recede into, as much as engulf, the expanse they occupy.

These works—one white, the other black—encapsulate the exhibition's distinctly monochrome tone. Seemingly deliberate, this aesthetic emerged from the works' connections with notions of absence and incommensurability, notions that themselves are often expressed visually using black, white and grey. As the exhibition evolved, it became clear that a focus on monochrome would also enable viewers to concentrate on intrinsic and contingent mechanisms of camouflage as opposed to its decorative and colourful aspects. *A Difficulty (Grey)* by Ho Rui An, for example, uses greyness as a way of undoing fixed conceptions of colour that are perpetuated by technologies of schematisation. In the video, 'Grey ... unravels ... as colour's recession, diffusing the visibility of colour as colour'.

The ambiguity of *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)* does not just benefit from the aesthetics of the works, but also their indeterminate origins. Inspired by a (now disproved) account of how moths in Britain in the 1950s developed dark-peppered wings to camouflage themselves in the polluted landscape, Robert Zhao Renhui's *White House Crow* depicts an imaginary species of crow, claimed to have emerged in Singapore during the time when extensive land reclamation was taking place on the island. On one level, *White House Crow* is quite literally camouflage, its quasi-photographic appearance masking the work's false representation of an endangered bird. On another level, the work acts as a metaphor for human societies' manipulation of the environment and its detrimental effects on natural species. The crow's redundant camouflage—exposed in the dark—renders this metaphor all the more poignant (it is 'reported' that the crows began to disappear as land reclamation slowed down).⁵

Containing elements of truth and fiction, *White House Crow* reveals the oft-masked reality that photographs always form constructed images. While the image in *White House Crow* looks like a photograph, a number of visual clues indicate its fictional nature, particularly its theatrical contrast between light and dark. Similar clues also emerge in his texts, which, weaving scientific observations with more fanciful propositions, almost read like factual documents (until the point when the viewer is able to verify their details). When viewed alongside his images, his texts become all the more plausible, each corroborating the 'evidence' supplied by the other.

The strength of Zhao Renhui's fictions—particularly his texts—is that they illustrate how much seeing is informed by language, as well as how language can mask, or even evade its premise to communicate. The title of the exhibition draws on elusions in grammar, using parenthesis as a way of simultaneously concealing and revealing its 'tactics in evasion'. This meandering mode of language infiltrates both *A Difficulty (Grey)* and *The*

Unassuming Eavesdropper, a sound installation by Tan Peiling composed of anonymous descriptions of a number of artworks in *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)* and other exhibitions. In these two works, equivocal expressions are used to explore subjects that elide simple explanation, whether the haziness of identity politics, or the subjectivities involved in interpretations of visual art.

The narratives in *The Unassuming Eavesdropper*—whose objects of scrutiny have been removed—evoke the authorless and distanced character of information in a digital age, which, having passed through multiple platforms and filters, seems to have lost its original identity. Ho Rui An uses information not dissimilar to this kind in *Self-Reliant Girl*, which features a blurred image of a woman gleaned from multiple internet searches beneath a quote about 'a slim, bespectacled girl from Singapore' from JM Coetzee's novel *Slow Man* (2005). This mixture of pre-existing and new content also surfaces in Jeremy Sharma's sculptures, which comprise various existing and new plugs and moulds, originally used to manufacture parts of marine, civil and aviation vehicles and technology. Fabricated by automated robots, they evince almost no trace of Sharma's intervention in them, reflecting his cession to increasingly sophisticated modes of production and artificial intelligence.

If the subsidizing artist is inevitable in Sharma's sculptures, in *We Are Pigeons* it forms a tactical manoeuvre, used by Tamares Goh to capture her work's fleeting subject. While many of the images relied on Goh's ability to remain undetected by the pigeons, others indicate their sudden acknowledgment of her presence, revealing the birds in mid-flight or disappearing towards the edge of the frame. I like to think of the various evasions in *We Are Pigeons* as also reflective of Goh's desire to make art on her own terms, outside of the pressures of private—and to a certain degree public—art institutions (the works themselves originate from over two decades' worth of photographs that she never previously considered as art).⁶ A number of artists in the exhibition occupy similar positions in relation to their art; Heman Chong tends not to talk directly about his work with critics and audiences, and Robert Zhao Renhui blurs his own commentaries with those of his fictional Critical Institute of Zoologists.

These stances imply that to uncritically participate in the art world and its institutions would be to subscribe to their imperatives to be packaged, sold and *seen*. By participating in this way, artists arguably lose their capacity to convey nuance, bound by a necessity to clearly communicate the meaning of their work. This loss is particularly relevant in Singapore, given the extent to which the art market, mediation and categorical models of exhibitions influence the perception of art.⁷ As observed by Tan Peiling, the danger of these models is how they lead the audience to take on a passive role as 'they wait to be made aware of what they are looking at'.⁸ Her own works seek to redress this relationship, using limited visual references and low levels of audibility to provoke the audience to seek out their presence in the gallery space.

What all the works in *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)* invariably illustrate is how cultures and conditions of viewing affect the visibility (or invisibility) of specific subjects and objects. In Singapore, part of this culture revolves around a focus on veneer (the outward appearance of operations and entities) that derives from its market capitalism and concomitant materialism. Another aspect of this culture relates to censorship, often used by the government to veil issues deemed provocative, or harmful to wider society. Indirectly, the works in *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)* respond to these conditions, using allusion and elusion to create alternative, and more nuanced spaces for seeing and articulating. The ambiguous, and shifting parameters of the works also express something of the intrinsic elusiveness of Singapore itself, whose constant urban regeneration seems to efface its prior, historical traces.⁹

In developing *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)*, I have wondered whether it creates its own contradiction. For, by explaining the premise of the exhibition and the works it features, have I not gone against the very intentions of both to evade? In response to this question, I think about how the exhibition forms an exercise in evasion, its monochrome aesthetic and overlapping referents allowing each work to spill into, and blend in with one another. I also think about the ironic ‘magic’ of camouflage, which is only truly realised after the moment it is perceived. This paradox is integral to elusive art, whose evasions regularly rely on frameworks to position them *as such*. To quote curator Ralph Rugoff:

The difference [between visible and invisible art] does not have to do with the inherent characteristics of the object—something that invisible art makes obvious—but with how it is positioned within a larger symbolic network. Invisible art thus helps us to grasp more clearly the acute contingency of art’s meaning (and it is worth noting in this regard that before we can ‘see’ an invisible work, it must first be framed as such by one means or another).¹⁰

Ralph Rugoff, ‘How to Look at Invisible Art’,
INVISIBLE: Art about the Unseen, 1957–2012, 2012

NOTES

- 1 Abbott Handerson Thayer, *Concealing—Coloration in the Animal Kingdom*. New York: Macmillan, 1909, p. 4.
- 2 Hanna Rose Shell, ‘The Crucial Moment of Deception: Abbott Handerson Thayer’s Law of Protective Coloration’, in *Cabinet* (33), 2009, p. 57.
- 3 Thayer, 1909, p. 11.
- 4 This reference to ‘force fields’ in *The Void* (1958) was made by Yves Klein himself; a reference that Ralph Rugoff highlights in his essay ‘How to Look at Invisible Art’ (2012): ‘Klein ... maintained that the space was actually saturated with a force field so visible that some people were unable to enter the exhibition “as if an invisible wall prevented them”’. Ralph Rugoff, ‘How to Look at Invisible Art’, in *INVISIBLE: Art about the Unseen, 1957–2012*, London: Hayward Publishing, 2012, p. 5.
- 5 Robert Zhao Renhui (The Institute of Critical Zoologists), ‘White House Crow’, in *A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World*. Singapore: The Institute of Critical Zoologists, 2013.
- 6 Tamares Goh, email corresp., 2014.
- 7 The influence of the private art market in Singapore can be seen in initiatives such as the Gillman Barracks precinct, an enclave of contemporary art galleries, and the Singapore Freeport, a tax-free storage space aimed at private art collectors. Dominant models of art exhibitions in Singapore centre on museological and didactic displays, which focus on distinguishing art as an object of cultural and economic value, as well as a form of mediation. Common means in such display include a theatrical use of lighting—recently used in the exhibitions *Unearthed* (2014) and *The Collector’s Show: Weight of History* (2013) at the Singapore Art Museum—and the use of interactive videos that attempt to ‘explain’ artworks to viewers.
- 8 Tan Peiling, email corresp., 2014.
- 9 Architect Rem Koolhaas famously described the self-effacing nature of Singapore in ‘Singapore Songlines’ (1998), an essay in which he elaborates his thesis of the city-state as a *tabula rasa*. For Koolhaas, Singapore’s programmes of land reclamation and urban renewal created ‘a condition of permanent instability’ on the island, as well as an impression of an endlessly shifting, abstract expanse. Rem Koolhaas, ‘Singapore Songlines’, in *S, M, L, XL*, New York: the Monacelli Press, 1998, p. 1031.
- 10 Rugoff, 2012, p. 25.





Liner, 2014

EPS foam, PU paste and automotive paint
20 × 320 × 10 cm

Courtesy the artist and Michael Janssen, Singapore/Berlin

Red Herring, 2014

automotive paint on fibreglass
5 parts, each 134 × 180 × 30 cm
Courtesy the artist and Michael Janssen, Singapore/Berlin

Unicorn, 2014

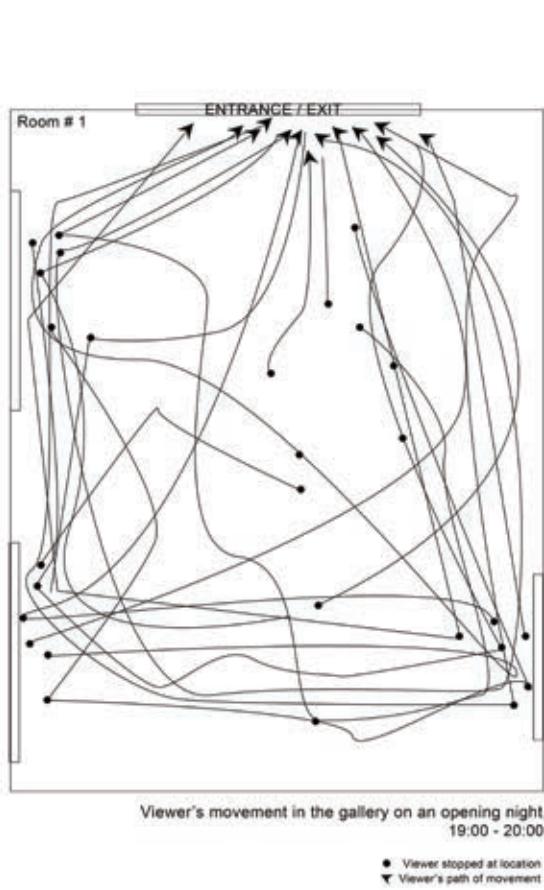
EPS foam, PU paste and duratec with white pigment
4 parts, 2 parts 96 × 215 × 81.5 cm, 2 parts 136 × 160 × 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Michael Janssen, Singapore/Berlin



Jeremy Sharma's works explore the increasing influence of digital technology and artificial intelligence on artistic production. Incorporating original and pre-conceived elements and automated processes, they create highly ambiguous forms that often indicate no trace of his role in them. His series *Terra Sensa* (2013), for example, transposes radiographs of pulsars—stars that emit electromagnetic radiation at regular intervals—onto sections of polyurethane foam, each fabricated by a self-directed machine.

Sharma's sculptures in *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)* were created using a similar process to *Terra Sensa*. Part of the artist's larger research project, *From Ear to Eye*, which explores new possibilities for drawing, sculpture and media in manufacturing and digital technologies, the sculptures consist of various moulds and plugs used to create parts for marine, defence and aviation industries in Singapore. The sculptures' titles—*Liner*, *Red Herring* and *Unicorn*—reflect this equivocal ontology, each as allusive as it is classificatory.

In one sense, Sharma's sculptures are literally *counter-shadows*; hollow containers designed to give shape to positive forms. The plugs, however, complicate this relationship, as casts for moulds that emulate positive forms. Their status as sculpture is also somewhat contingent, the black and white surfaces of the plugs and moulds both hidden, and framed by, each other and the monochrome aesthetic of the exhibition. Isolated from their original function, the plugs and moulds seem more like simulations of space than actual volumes; an impression that likely stems from their digital origins. Deriving from AutoCAD drawings and digital files, they appear to belong to no distinct media or dimension, their virtual and physical aspects morphing into one.



The Unassuming Eavesdropper, 2014

sound installation
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

The display of artworks in gallery spaces is often manipulated to solicit specific reactions from the audience. In such spaces, the audience becomes aware of their role as viewers, their judgments invariably shaped by personal and prevailing views. Taking the idea that one person's response can affect another person's viewpoint, *The Unassuming Eavesdropper* explores the role of the audience in how an artwork is interpreted (or misinterpreted) and valued.

The work comprises recordings of comments and thoughts from artists, curators and gallery visitors about artworks in various exhibitions, including those in *Countershadows (tactics in evasion)*. Their impressions of the latter were solely based on images of the works provided by the artist. These comments were edited and put together to create ambiguous narratives, whose exact subjects are difficult to discern. Purely descriptive and subjective, the narratives provide diverse accounts and interpretations of the artworks. While some overlap in their observations, others deviate from the works' original intents, offering alternative insights about them.

Played from speakers hidden in two sides of a column in the gallery, *The Unassuming Eavesdropper* reflects the structure of a conversation, in which each speaker responds to the other. Yet as the narratives unfold, it becomes clear that they are not directly related. Audible near the works to which some of them refer, the narratives sound both relevant and removed, their connection to the works ultimately dependent on the audience's interpretation. It is this relationship that reveals the irony of the 'unassuming eavesdropper', who, privy to information unintended for their consumption, creates their own assumptions about what is heard.



AN INTERVIEW
The evolution of the White House Crow on Singapore Island
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// Pale-coloured crows have been spotted in Singapore over the past decade. Satoshi // Kataoka, organiser of the International Ornithological Congress of South-east // Asia, discusses this phenomenon with Dr Xu Guangqi, director of Tropical Biology // of Asia Institute, which is dedicated to the study of biodiversity.

| 01 | (Satoshi Kataoka) | When was the first reported sighting of |
| 02 | a white crow? |

03	(Xu Guangqi)	Actually, there has always been a
04	dark grey form of the common House	
05	Crow, whose more "normal" form is dark	
06	coloured. But it was in 1978 that	
07	the first white form of this crow was	
08	reported in Singapore. Back then, it	
09	was considered so rare and unusual	
10	that there was a shrine dedicated to	
11	it. We believe that this individual	
12	still exists today – it is quite	
13	commonly identified by birdwatchers as	
14	its belly has a distinctive pale grey	
15	swathe. If we are right, the crow is	
16	almost 50 years old.	
17		
18	Towards the end of the 1990s, a large	
19	proportion of the crows found in	
20	Singapore were of this paler form.	
21	A very distinguished Singaporean	
22	ornithologist proposed a hypothesis	
23	for why this was occurring. There	
24	had been so much land reclamation in	
25	Singapore since the 1970s, creating	
26	vast areas of sand that had to be left	
27	around for years before the land is	
28	compacted enough to be developed.	
29		
30	Crows that lived around these	
31	reclaimed areas had to adapt. The new	
32	environment lacked trees, and the	
33	areas of whitish sand made what was	
34	previously a well camouflaged crow	
35	conspicuous to predators. The crows	
36	also suffered from overheating due	
37	to a lack of shade. A chance white	
38	mutation could have triggered off the	
39	adaptation to a lighter colour. Having	
40	a lighter colour left the species at	
41	a greater advantage if it wanted to	
42	survive on the sandy reclaimed land.	

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43	<S.K.>	So basically if you're a black crow
44		flying along the reclaimed land for a
45		long time looking for food, you'll
46		burn out faster than usual and your
47		predators can see you more easily in
48		the white sand, whereas white crows
49		are less visible.
50	<X.G.>	Yes, it's simply a case of logical
51		adaptation to heat and a sandier
52		environment.
53	<S.K.>	So the more pale ones survive, the
54		more there will be in the next
55		generation. But there's been some
56		criticism of this hypothesis.
57	<X.G.>	In our experiments, we tested the
58		hypothesis of the sand adaptation
59		phenomenon. We got a reclaimed site in
60		Singapore and a reclaimed site in Hong
61		Kong. We left birds of varying degrees
62		of colouration in both sites. We found
63		a reciprocal result in our data. More
64		of the dark crows were dying in the
65		reclaimed land. The criticism against
66		our experiment was that we were using
67		a mixture of lab-bred crows and wild
68		caught crows, so they may not have
69		been behaving naturally with one
70		another. That may have contributed to
71		other stresses on the birds.
72	<S.K.>	What happened to the white crows after
73		the reclaimed land was developed?
74	<X.G.>	There was a reduction in number of
75		white crows following the regeneration
76		of the reclaimed land, when trees
77		were grown on the sites after two
78		years. Currently, few individuals
79		have survived, though there is that
80		special crow with the grey belly that
81		is still spotted now and then. If you
82		come birdwatching with me, I can show
83		you. Don't ask me where the shrine is
84		though, no one has been able to find it
85		in Tuas.

White House Crow, 2013
adhesive vinyl print
200 × 300 cm
Courtesy the artist

Interview: The Evolution of the White House Crow on Singapore Island, 2013
archival piezographic print, wood frame
84 × 121 cm
Courtesy the artist

White House Crow depicts a fictional species of bird claimed to have emerged in Singapore between 1978 and 1995. According to an account by the artist, the species originally evolved from black crows, which developed white feathers in response to land reclamation that was taking place at the time. The lack of trees, and flat expanses of sand in the new land exposed the crows' black feathers, causing them to grow white feathers as a form of camouflage. Another possible reason was that the crows' white feathers enabled them to deflect the high levels of heat generated by the large quantities of sand.

In the image, a white house crow is shown perched on a tree branch in a tenebrous landscape. Highlighted by a soft pool of light, the crow appears to illuminate itself, its white feathers contrasting with the surrounding shadows. This subtle staging introduces an element of doubt in the image; an uncertainty that is also conveyed in its format as a vinyl print. When viewed from afar, the details of the crow are barely perceptible; when seen up close, the entirety of the image becomes impossible to grasp.

Such tensions—between fact and fiction and what is seen and unseen—are common in Zhao's works. Produced under his fictional research body, The Institute of Critical Zoologists, they focus on the 'zoological gaze'—how humans perceive natural life, and how such life has adapted as a result of human intervention. This focus leads to a questioning of how humans' knowledge of nature is framed and constructed, particularly through combinations of image and text. The work's accompanying text, *Interview: The Evolution of the White House Crow on Singapore Island*, conceals the illusion created by the image with observations about its subject from a Japanese ornithologist and Chinese biologist. But while the interview seems to reinforce the image, its own authenticity is thrown into question, the page numbers at the top right of each page indicating its status as only part of a full interview. By directing our attention to what lies outside the image and the text, the artist encourages the viewer to question the veracity of both, as well as pursue their own understanding of what each may represent.

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Biographies

HEMAN CHONG is an artist, curator and writer. He received his MA in Communication Art & Design from The Royal College of Art, London in 2002. His conceptually-charged investigations into how individuals and communities imagine the future generate a multiplicity of objects, images, installations, situations and texts.

He has developed solo exhibitions at Gallery Em, Seoul; P!, New York; FOST, Singapore; Michael Janssen, Singapore; The Reading Room, Bangkok; Future Perfect, Singapore; Wilkinson, London; Rossi & Rossi, London/Hong Kong; SOTA Gallery, Singapore; NUS Museum, Singapore; Kunstverein Milano, Milan; Motive Gallery, Amsterdam; Hermes Third Floor, Singapore; Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou; Art In General, New York; Project Arts Centre, Dublin; Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam; The Substation, Singapore; Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin; and Sparwasser HQ, Berlin. His work has also been shown extensively in group exhibitions, including De Appel Arts Centre, Sharjah Art Foundation, Taipei Contemporary Art Center, San Francisco Asian Art Museum, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Nam June Paik Art Center, Gertrude Contemporary, Arnolfini, Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Hamburger Bahnhof, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and Kadist Art Foundation. He has participated in numerous international biennales including 10th Gwangju Biennale

(2014), Asia Pacific Triennale 7 (2012), Performa 11 (2011), Momentum 6 (2011), Manifesta 8 (2010), Singapore Biennale (2008), SCAPE Christchurch Biennale (2006), Busan Biennale (2004), 10th India Triennale (2000) and represented Singapore in the 50th Venice Biennale (2003). His work is included in the permanent collections of Kadist Art Foundation; M+ Museum; NUS Museum; and the Singapore Art Museum.

TAMARES GOH received her BA in Fine Art from LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts/ RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia in 1996 and her Master of Fine Art from the Glasgow School of Art in 2001. Her practice explores contingent and ephemeral relationships between the body, time and space using a range of media and techniques, including photography, drawing and installation.

She has participated in artist residency programmes at Studio 106, Fundamental Multi-Disciplinary Theatre Company at Telok Ayer Performing Arts Centre, and Hotel Maria Kapel in Hoorn, The Netherlands, as well as international exhibitions at Hunter College, New York; Mackintosh Building, Glasgow School of Art; Tramway, Glasgow; and Portikus, Frankfurt. She has also been the recipient of several awards, including the Della Butcher Award (1995), 18th Shell Discovery Art Award (1995) and Chen Chong Swee Art

Scholarship (1999). Since 2003, she has been involved with curatorial work at Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, where she leads the visual arts programme. In 2012, on Esplanade's 10th anniversary, she co-led the tribute.sg project, the first repository for the arts of its kind in Singapore. She was also a co-curator of the Singapore Biennale (2013).

HO RUI AN is an artist and writer working in the intersections of contemporary art, cinema, performance and theory. Attending to problems of visuality, he writes, talks and thinks around images, investigating their sites of emergence, transmission and disappearance. He is currently developing a body of work surrounding image economies in Singapore and Southeast Asia and has presented projects at Serpentine Galleries, London; Singapore Art Museum, LUMA/Westbau, Zürich; and Witte de With, Rotterdam. He is the Singapore desk editor for *ArtAsiaPacific* and has contributed to numerous catalogues and periodicals. In 2011, his first novel, *Several Islands*, was published by The Substation, Singapore. He lives and works in New York and Singapore.

DARRYL LIM is a Singaporean educator and graphic designer. In design education, he lectures and mentors across a range of educational levels from Diploma to BA (Hons) at LASALLE College of the Arts and Glasgow School of Art–Singapore Institute of Technology. As a graphic designer he works under his eponymous studio practice, with a specific focus on the conception and design of printed matter and ephemera—publications, books, catalogues and posters. He frequently works and collaborates with individuals and commissioners in the art, culture and education sectors.

MELANIE POCOCK is a curator and writer. A graduate of the Royal College of Art's MA in Curating Contemporary Art, she previously held curatorial positions at Art

Scene China and Modern Art Oxford, where she worked on solo exhibitions by Shezad Dawood and Stephen Willats, and *Platform*, a showcase of graduate artists from Southeast England. Her research interests include how artistic practices are shaped and articulated by intercultural exchanges, as well shifting modalities in contemporary media. Her writing and art criticism have appeared in magazines, newspapers and journals, such as *Eyeline*, *ArtAsiaPacific*, *Frieze*, *Kaleidoscope*, *The Financial Times* and *Third Text*. She recently edited and co-authored *Sulaiman* (2014), the first monograph on the work of Shooshie Sulaiman, published by Kerber Verlag. She is currently Assistant Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore.

SAI HUA KUAN graduated with a Diploma in Fine Art from LASALLE College of the Arts and a Masters in Fine Art from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. His practice encompasses a range of media and techniques, including drawing, film, performance, photography, sculpture, sound and installation. Often comprising whimsical manipulations of everyday objects and materials, his works involve explorations of space and time in relation to architectural concerns, as well as the subversive potential of humour.

He has had solo exhibitions at Osage Gallery, Hong Kong (2014); and Yavuz Fine Art, Singapore (2012), and participated in many international exhibitions, including the Singapore Biennale (2013); Moscow International Biennale for Young Art (2010); Luleå Art Biennial, Sweden (2011) and the International Festival for Arts and Media, Yokohama (2009). He has participated in residencies at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Artist Residency (2013); The Earth Observatory Singapore (2012) and Aberystwyth Arts Centre (2011), and received several awards, including Best Film at the Fundada Artists'

Film Festival, Wakefield, United Kingdom (2010) and Winner of the International Competition, Tower Kronprinz: Second Advent(2009), organised by National Centre for Contemporary Arts, Kaliningrad, Russia. He lives and works in Singapore.

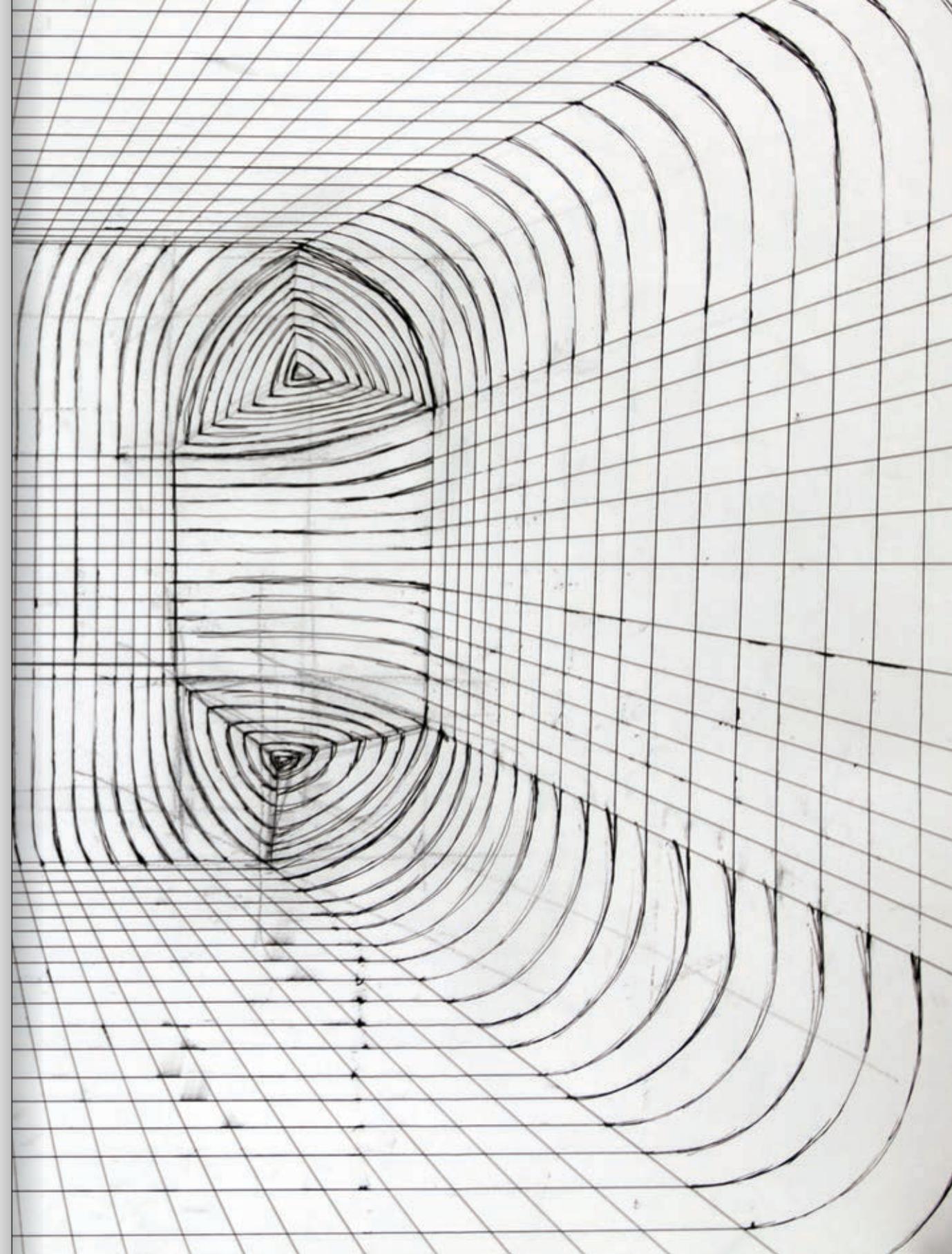
JEREMY SHARMA's works encompass painting, video, photography, drawing and installation. He is also a musician, and has performed, collaborated and recorded for various albums, gigs, theatre and radio. His current practice investigates the notion of art in an age of mechanical, industrial and digital reproduction and interconnectivity, addressing human relationships to space and time in an increasingly fragmented and artificial reality.

He obtained his MA in Fine Art at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts in 2006, and his BA in Fine Art with High Distinction from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia in 2003. Over the past nine years, he has had a number of solo presentations in Singapore, including *Mode Change*, at Michael Janssen, Singapore, the Singapore Biennale (2013), *Apropos* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (2012), *Variations* at Art Forum Gallery (2011), *The Protection Paintings—Of Sensations and Superscriptions* (2008) at Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and *End of A Decade* (2007) at The Substation Gallery. He has also participated in group exhibitions in Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Italy, Switzerland, England and the United States. He currently teaches in the Faculty of Fine Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts.

TAN PEILING graduated with a Masters in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London, in 2011, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, in 2010. Her practice looks at how visual media informs human perception and understandings of reality. By utilising audio recordings and visual images,

she constructs different spaces, exploring how visual culture shapes attention and experience. She received the Kwek Leng Joo Prize of Excellence in Still Photography in 2010, Singapore, and was shortlisted for the Bar Tur Photography Award in 2011. Her works have been shown at Artspace @Helutrans, Aliwal Arts Centre, Sculpture Square, C L O S U R E at Teban Gardens, *OH! Open House* at Marina Bay, and *Campaign City* at National Library Building. She was also recently involved in a residency project, Bureau, organised by Sculpture Square.

ROBERT ZHAO RENHUI (THE INSTITUTE OF CRITICAL ZOOLOGISTS) focuses on photography, frequently adopting a multi-disciplinary approach in which images are presented together with documents and objects. His works have been shown at exhibitions internationally, including at PhotoIreland (2014), Moscow International Biennale for Young Art (2014), Grand Prix Fotofestiwal (2014), Singapore Biennale (2013), Chapter Arts Centre, Photoquai (2013), International Festival of Photography at Mineiro Museum, Primo Marella Gallery and *Engaging Perspectives* at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore. He has also exhibited in Noorderlicht Photo Festival, Format Festival, Lianzhou International Photo Festival, Fukouka Asian Art Museum, Photo Levallois, Seoul Arts Center, GoEun Museum of Photography, The Zabludowicz Collection, Shanghart and PPOW, New York.



Countershadows (tactics in evasion)
Curated by Melanie Pocock

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Designer's notes: the logic of the publication's design alludes to the exhibition's theme; the notions of 'evasive action and maneuver' are subtly expressed through the use of graphic devices such as double-page spread images slipping into the spine and exiting from another page somewhere in the back of the publication and with various typographic elements pushed to the page corners and appearing at angles.

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Heman Chong, Tamares Goh, Ho Rui An,
Sai Hua Kuan, Jeremy Sharma, Tan Peiling,
Robert Zhao Renhui (The Institute of Critical Zoologists)

Countershadows (tactics in evasion) is an exhibition and catalogue that focuses on art characterised by its evasive concepts and aesthetics. Featuring new and existing installation, sound, sculpture, photography and video by seven artists from Singapore, it explores how exposure and concealment are often intertwined, each paradoxically revealing the qualities and axioms of the other.



Heman Chong, Tamares Goh, Ho Rui An,
Sai Hua Kuan, Jeremy Sharma, Tan Peiling,
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